

NSC BRIEFING

9 May 1957

DEVELOPMENTS IN LAOS

I. Evidence is mounting that Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma--symbol of Royal Gov't "soft" approach to Pathet Lao rebels--will resign (or be ousted) during next session of National Assembly (opens 11 May).

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A. The number of Assembly deputies and army leaders who are reportedly dissatisfied with Souvanna's conduct of negotiations and angry over recent Pathet military pressure in the north is rising. 25X1C

[redacted] Phoui--leader of Laos' second largest political party--is complaining that Gov't dissension and lack of authority is permitting unhindered Pathet subversive activity.

II. Our Embassy has noted a hardening attitude in Vientiane toward Pathet delegation.

A. Many government leaders reportedly feel Pathet negotiators should come to terms or get out of town.

B. Tripartite mid-April note (US-UK-France), which supported reunification of Laos while opposing dangerous concessions to Pathets, was favorably received in most Laotian political circles - and by Souvanna as well.

III. If Souvanna quits or is ousted, we anticipate a prolonged cabinet crisis.

A. Neither of the two major parties on Laotian political scene is assured of necessary two-thirds Assembly vote.

State Department review completed

- B. Any candidate prime minister would have to offer cabinet posts to factions outside his own party.
- C. Also, Constitution prevents any prospective cabinet member who is Assembly deputy from voting in confirmation of new government.
 - 1. Since usually 12 portfolios and only 39 deputies, this rule not only offers prospect of troublesome delay but also gives handful of leftists in Assembly disproportionate influence.
 - 2. Bong Souvannouvong (no relation to Pathet chief), leading leftist deputy, is effective demagogue who in ~~past~~ ^{PAST} has mustered as many as 19 votes to support his position on various issues.

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LAOS

- I. Evidence is mounting that Laotian premier Souvanna Phouma--symbol of Royal Gov't "soft" approach to Pathet Lao rebels--will resign (or be ousted) during next session of National Assembly (opens Sat).
 - A. Vientiane's attitude toward Pathets is hardening.
- II. Souvanna stepdown will almost certainly precipitate prolonged cabinet crisis.
 - A. Neither of two major political parties (both anti-Communist) can get necessary two-thirds Assembly vote and leaders' feuds make coalition unlikely.
 - B. Effective leftist demagogue in Assembly is in position to extend deadlock indefinitely.
 - C. Dark horse candidate--freshly-retained Prince Petsarath--is opposed by Crown Prince, army, and several deputies.
- III. Any period of political uncertainty and lack of effective Gov't would facilitate subversive maneuvering by Pathets.
 - A. Meanwhile, Pathets have kept up military pressure in disputed provinces; one report states they may be preparing a large-scale (4 battalion) attack to coincide with Souvanna's resignation.